



## ***The Board Develops Policy***

### **IC 36-12-3-3**

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Ask any board member to define the board's job and you'll likely hear, "The board's job is to set policy." Ask for a definition of policy and you'll probably get no more than a confused look.

***"The board's job is to set policy."***

To do your board member job well, you must understand policy because that's where you'll be spending your time--making policies, wrestling with policy issues, interpreting policies, monitoring policy effectiveness, enforcing policy, setting direction for the library through policies, protecting yourself and the library through a good set of policies.

You probably have unwritten family policies: "Homework will be completed before the television may be turned on." The Constitution of the United States is full of policies for our country: "Congress shall make no law respecting establishment of religion."

#### **A good set of written board policies...**

- informs everyone of board intent, goals, and aspirations.
- prevents confusion among board members, staff and the public.
- promotes consistency of board action.
- eliminates the need for instant (crisis) policy making.
- reduces criticism of the board and management.
- improves public relations.
- clarifies board member, director and staff roles.
- gives the director a clear direction from the board.

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***Policy is  
written***

Policy is a written statement of the process and procedures for handling a specifically defined issue. Just entering a motion into the meeting minutes that says the board will follow a particular direction is not policy. Relying on board tradition to be board policy is not enough. Determination of how the board handled an issue the last three times is not policy.

***Board policy is a carefully designed, written general statement of direction for the library, formally adopted by a majority vote of the board at a legally constituted board meeting.***

Using the general guidelines of board policies, the director and staff will write rules and regulations for operation of the library. For example, your library board may develop a policy that says the library will have a video collection for public lending.

The director and staff will then write guidelines for purchasing materials for the collection, lending rules for the collection and various other regulations necessary to maintain and manage the collection.

**Board policy is not...**

Your bylaws are not your board policies. Bylaws are a higher and more permanent set of guidelines for how the board will operate. They are usually harder to change than board policies and do not cover the broad scope of how the library will operate.

Board policies are not laws. There is little need to repeat in board policy those statutes that already have the force of state or federal law, unless the board policy spells out some special manner in which the library will implement or comply with a law. For example, if state law prescribes when your fiscal year will begin, there is no need to repeat that law in a board policy.

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A board should "develop" policy and not just "write" policy. Good policy grows out of a lengthy process of studying the issues and needs, gathering facts, deliberating the issues, writing the policy and reviewing the policy annually.

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*The process for  
developing  
policy*

Let's look at policy development step by step.

**1) Identify the need.** Unfortunately, many library policies are a direct result of a problem or even a crisis rather than a result of careful planning and foresight.

When a delegation of "concerned citizens" appears at your board meeting demanding that you eliminate your collection of videos, it's very easy to identify the need for a policy on censorship and another policy to control citizen conduct at board meetings.

A better way to identify need for particular policies is to anticipate problems and write policies before the problems occur. Study other library policy manuals. Ask the State Library, Library Development Office for help, 317-232-3697 or 1-800-451-6028 (Indiana only). Policies from other libraries can be loaned to you by the Library Development Office. See also the following link on the Indiana State Library's website for examples of policies from Indiana public libraries.

<http://www.in.gov/library/3290.htm>

Pay attention to what's happening with other libraries in the state and across the nation. If a library in Iowa ends up in litigation for denying access to materials or services of the library, your library should review your own access policies. Learn from the mistakes of others.



**2) Gather the facts.** Most policies will grow out of recommendations from the library director. Your director is in touch with trends, problems and issues that demand policy statements from the board.

Depending on the nature of the policy, you may want to ask for public input, seek legal counsel or even hire a consultant to help you develop a policy.

**3) Deliberate the issue.** This is where your perspective as a representative of the community to the library comes into play. You know community standards and community needs. Careful deliberation of a proposed board policy should include several considerations.

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Is the proposed policy...

- really necessary?
- consistent with our mission statement?
- within the scope of our authority as a board?
- consistent with local, state and federal law?
- compatible with our other policies?
- practical?
- broad enough to cover the subject completely?
- enforceable?
- affordable?

**4) Write the policy.** The actual wording of the policy is best left to the library director or a task force of board members and director rather than the full board struggling with wording. The actual policy may come to the board and back to committee for revision several times before it's finalized. Making good policy takes time.

Final approval of the written policy is a board responsibility and should be done at a formal board meeting.

**5) Review your policies annually.** Although you write policies to be durable, policies do become out of date, and an out-of-date policy can be as bad as having no policy at all. Annual review of your board policies can help you keep your policies current and at the same time keep board members current about board policies.

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***The policy  
manual***

To make your board policies usable, they should be collected and codified in one manual. The manual makes the process of learning board policy simple for new board members and it makes application and interpretation of policies easier.

A manual also makes the process of review and update of board policies much easier. An all-at-once approach to revision is much too cumbersome for any board. An easier way is to give every policy a date and then make sure the board or a committee of the board examines each policy on or before that date each year. That makes it an ongoing process and much less overwhelming.

All changes in the policy manual must have full board approval.

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A. Policies needed to fulfill requirement of “Minimum Standards for Public Libraries” - 590 IAC Article 6, <http://www.in.gov/legislative/iac/T05900/A00060.PDF?>

B.

1. Library board by laws that state its purpose and its operational procedures. The bylaws shall specifically state rules governing conflicts of interest issues and nepotism.

2. Long-range plan (3 to 5 years).

(A). A statement of community needs and goals.

(B) Measurable objectives and service responses to the community's needs and goals.

(C) An assessment of facilities, services, technology, and operations.

(D) An ongoing annual evaluation process.

(E) Financial resources and sustainability.

(F) Collaboration with other:

(i) public libraries; and

(ii) community partners.

3. Technology plan. (3 years. At a minimum, the plan shall include the following:

(A) Goals and realistic strategy for using telecommunications and information technology.

(B) A professional development strategy.

(C) An assessment of telecommunication services, hardware, software, and other services needed.

(D) An equipment replacement schedule.

(E) Financial resources and sustainability.

(F) An ongoing annual evaluation process.

(G) An automation plan that conforms to national cataloging standards.

4 Collection development policy

5. Library policies

6. The library must comply with federal laws affecting employment practice. The library shall have written personnel policies and procedures. Written personnel policies and procedures must address at least the following:

(1) Employment practices, such as the following:

(A) Recruitment.

(B) Selection.

(C) Appointment.

(2) Personnel actions.

(3) Salary administration.

(4) Employee benefits

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*What  
are the  
policies/  
plans  
required  
by Indiana*

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(5) Conditions of work.

(6) Leaves

B. Travel policy (could be a part of the Personnel policy Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 8-3

D. Moving and interview expense policy (could be part of the Personnel policy), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 8-4

E. Records excepted from disclosure policy - IC 5-14-3-4(b), (could be part of the Personnel policy), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 6-4

F. Disaster recovery plan for computer systems, (could be part of the Personnel policy), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 5-4

G. Investment policy - IC 5-13-7-7, (could be part of the Personnel policy), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 9-14

H. Public Purchasing policy - IC 5-22-3-3), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 10-7 (Small Purchase Policy-under \$25,000)

*Other areas  
to consider  
for written board  
policies*

I. Internet Acceptable Use policy - IC 36-12-1-7, federal laws: Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and Neighborhood Children's Internet Protection Act (N-CIPA)

J. Fines and Fees policy (could be part of the circulation policy), Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Libraries, Chapter 1-3

The Library Development Office has copies of other bylaws and policies. You can have these interlibrary loaned, faxed or emailed to you at any time during the year.

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The list below is not a comprehensive checklist of policies your board should have. These are categories for your consideration and a few examples of the types of policies that fall under each category.

• **board operations**

board/director relationship

methods of adopting policies

• **services**

types of programs and services offered

service goals

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Intellectual freedom

circulation/registration

• **community relations**

community use of facilities

news media relations

public solicitation and advertising in the library

• **building and grounds**

construction contracts -

disposal of property

facility planning

naming of facilities

maintenance requirements

• **administration**

authority delegated to the director

evaluation of the director

compensation of the director

• **business**

service contracts

budgeting

inventories

purchasing

insurance

• **personnel**

Termination

staff development

paid/unpaid leave

personnel records

part-time help

evaluation

sexual harassment

safety/health

transfers

reduction in force

grievances

For models of library board policy manuals, contact the Library Development Office of the Indiana State Library, 317-232-3697 or 1-800-451-6028 (Indiana only).

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## **Notes:**